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Scottish Bird News

No 67 Mar. 2003

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Goldfinches in Gardens

Are Goldfinches following in the footsteps of Siskins? Dr Martin Collinson discusses the results of a recent SOC survey.

In *SBN* 62 (June 2001) I requested information on Goldfinches feeding in gardens, especially on peanuts. The "discovery" of garden peanuts by Siskins in the 1970s and '80s, and Greenfinches previously, has been reasonably well documented. The rise in reports of Goldfinches in gardens feeding on peanuts lead, therefore, to the suspicion that a similar process was underway for this species too. I asked people to describe when Goldfinches first appeared in their gardens and what they were doing there. A self-selected survey like this can only really be performed as a bit of fun and, in any case, the data set cannot compete with the hundreds of gardens that contribute to the BTO Garden Bird Feeding Survey, but some interesting things came out of it, as described below.

On the fence. Have Goldfinches finally made the leap from countryside to garden? (Laurie Campbell)

Information was received from 53 gardens. Fifty of these were in Scotland, with good geographical coverage. Ideally, each report would have the location and grid reference of the garden, the year the garden was first watched (*ie* the earliest date that Goldfinches would have been noted if they were there), the date that Goldfinches were first noted in the garden and the date they were first seen taking food from feeders. Also useful were details of the months in which Goldfinches appeared on feeders, approximate numbers seen, the type of food taken (and types of food offered but not taken), and whether any "natural" food was taken. Of course, not all people were able to provide all of this data, a situation exacerbated because I did not ask for all this in the original request!

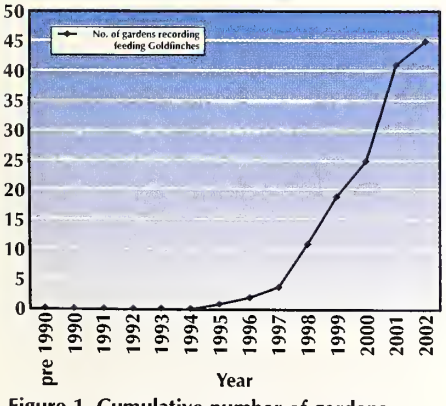

Figure 1. Cumulative number of gardens recording feeding Goldfinches

When did Goldfinches start using garden feeders?

Forty-five people gave the year when they first noted Goldfinches on garden feeders. The first report was in 1995, with evidence of continued expansion of this habit such that by 2001 (the last year fully covered), 16 people recorded the species for the first time. These results are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. There was no obvious geographical bias to the records – the 1995 report was from Ross-shire, the 1996 one from Dumfries and Galloway, with the 1997-8 reports widespread in Lothian, Borders, Fife and Strathclyde.

Twenty-five respondents gave the date that Goldfinches were first seen in their garden (whether feeding or not). This suggested that the species was a regular if uncommon visitor to gardens for several years before the birds discovered bird-feeders. Goldfinches were recorded in eight gardens prior to 1990 whereas, on the other hand, some people only recorded the birds for the first time in 2001 or 2002 when they turned up on the feeders (Table 2).

The mean number of years between a garden being watched and the first appearance of Goldfinches was 4.7 years (range 0-15; 13 gardens provided this

Table 1. Gardens recording Goldfinches on bird-feeders, 1994-2002

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. first reports	0	1	1	2	7	8	6	16	4
Cumulative Score	0	1	2	4	11	19	25	41	45

Table 2. Gardens recording presence of Goldfinches, with or without feeding.

Year	pre-1990	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
No. 1st reports	8	1	1	0	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	1
Cumulative score	8	9	10	10	11	12	14	16	17	19	20	22	24	25

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Table 2. Months in which Goldfinches were recorded at garden feeders.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. gardens (/37)	16	19	27	31	20	17	13	5	8	9	14	15
%	43.2	51.4	73.0	83.8	54.1	45.9	35.1	13.5	21.6	24.3	37.8	40.5

information) and the mean number of years between birds appearing in the garden and using bird-feeders was 5.4 (range 0-14; 20 gardens). Thus the mean time between first starting to watch the garden and first seeing Goldfinches using feeders was 10.4 years (range 0-30; 21 gardens). Note that because not all respondents provided all the relevant dates, the third figure is not exactly the sum of the first two because all three calculations are using slightly different, if overlapping series of gardens.

Taken at face value, these data point to a long lag before Goldfinches discovered what bird-feeders are for, possibly due to an initial reluctance to enter all but large rural or suburban gardens. There has, however, been an enthusiastic and continuing uptake of this resource since 1995.

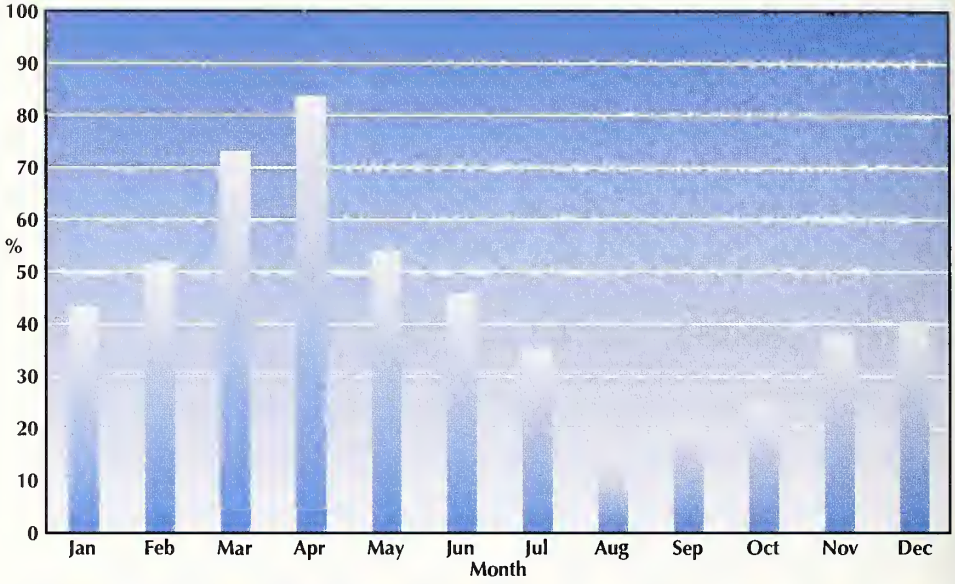

Figure 2. Month-by-month breakdown of visits by Goldfinches

What do Goldfinches eat at garden feeders?

The following data are restricted to those gardens that both recorded feeding Goldfinches and described the type of food on offer and what they ate.

Peanuts Goldfinches ate peanuts in 43/45 gardens (95.6%) that offered them.

Niger Goldfinches fed on niger seed in 9/11 gardens (81.8%) that offered it.

Sunflower Seed Goldfinches fed on sunflower seeds (or sunflower hearts) in 7/8 gardens (87.5%) that offered them.

Commercial seed mix Goldfinches fed on 'seed' (assumed to be commercial seed mixes) in 4/8 gardens (50%) that offered them.

Lard Goldfinches were recorded eating lard in one garden out of the two they visited (50%) where this food was provided.

This suggests that, on and off, Goldfinches will eat pretty much anything that is offered, but with a clear preference for peanuts, niger and sunflower seeds. It seems likely that a newly developed preference for peanuts underlies the increasing frequency of visits to gardens. In addition, Goldfinches were reported feeding on 'natural' or incidental garden plants in 10 gardens (although in only one of these were they not also eating from feeders). In these 10 gardens the most popular garden foodplant was lavender (5/10), followed by teasel (4/10), Michaelmas Daisy (1/10) and unidentified 'seed-heads' (1/10).

When do Goldfinches feed in gardens?

Month-by-month information on the presence or absence of Goldfinches on feeders was received from 37 gardens. This showed that early spring (March and April) were the months when Goldfinches are most likely to be recorded feeding in gardens, with least reports in late summer (Table 2 and Figure 2).

Conclusions

The increasing frequency of Goldfinches in gardens is linked to an explosive discovery of peanuts at garden feeders. It is suggested that the use of peanuts by Goldfinches began only in, or shortly prior to, 1995. That it has caught on so rapidly implies that the behaviour is being passed on culturally, *ie* the birds learn to do it from watching their companions. It is interesting to notice that data from the BTO Garden Bird Feeding Survey also showed a rapid increase in garden Goldfinches utilising peanuts in the winter of 1994-5 (see, for example, *BTO News* 242: 7, 2002).

BWP states that Goldfinches feed on a wide variety of seeds, supplemented by arthropods and occasionally other material. A large component of their diet is the 'milky' unripe small seeds of their food plants. There is a strong component of communal foraging and local 'traditions' or habits of preferring or avoiding particular foods. Thus, although peanuts do not represent a natural-type food, the mechanisms are in place for rapid learning and exploitation of the new food resource. And, of course, the birds are inherently perfectly capable of perching and manoeuvring on peanut feeders, perhaps even more so than, for example, Greenfinches.

Utilisation of garden feeders by Goldfinches is least frequent in late summer, rising gradually during the autumn and winter to a peak in early spring. This suggests that garden feeders are used as secondary sources of supplementary food when their natural diet is scarce. It is possible that peanuts act as a valuable source of energy and protein for females prior to laying in late April and May.

I thank all the people who share my enthusiasm for these birds and took the time to send in their records, sometimes in great detail. I hope you all find the results interesting.

Martin Collinson
docmartin@calcarius.freeserve.co.uk

STOP PRESS: Masterplan for Musselburgh Lagoons

Proposals which will significantly change the appearance of Musselburgh Lagoons have been prepared for East Lothian Council, Queen Margaret University College and Enterprise Edinburgh & Lothians. Three disjunct areas are designated for wildlife (two with SPA status), packed in with a new nine-hole golf course, a football academy and sports centre, including an 11+ metre-high building immediately south of the scrapes, and a 4* hotel. More details can be found at www.andrewsi.freeserve.co.uk/birding musselburgh.htm including how to register your comments with the East Lothian Council.

Ian J Andrews

Scottish Bird News
No 67 March 2003

Edited by
Mike Fraser
Assisted by
Liz Fraser
Caroline Scott
Bill Gardner

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 2nd May 2004 to:

SBN Editor, SOC,
Harbour Point,
Newhailes Road,
Musselburgh EH21 6SJ

Articles and photographs can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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A Swallow leaving its nest in an Ayrshire stable -
David Callan's winning entry in the 2002 SOC Photographic Competition.

NEWS & NOTICES

Annual Conference & AGM

Advance notice is given that the 2003 Annual Conference will be held at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore, over the weekend of 31st October to 2nd November. The Club AGM will be held on Saturday 1st November, 2003.

New members

We warmly welcome the following new members. We hope you enjoy all that the SOC has to offer and look forward to seeing you at branch meetings and other club activities. Good birding!

Ayrshire James Dunlop, Ms Eleanora Forrester, Robert Hewitson, Mrs Constance Hoskins, Thomas and Molly McBroom, James McGrady, Thomas and Margaret Morrall, John Rattenbury, Miss Gillian Smart, Don Smith. **Borders** Laurie Campbell. **Central** Ms Elaine Cameron, Margaret and Paul Jarvis, Mr and Mrs R M Knight. **Clyde** Ms Clare Darlaston, Andrew Howie, Scott MacFarlane, Dr C J McInerny, Iain McMillan, John Reid, Frederick Skarpaas, Mrs Margaret Stead, David Vockings. **Dumfries** Michael and Pat Abery, William McMichael. **Fife** Howard Chapman, Tom Cunningham, Tony Grice, Ross McGregor, David Ogilvie, Donald Phimister. **Grampian** Mike Chandler, James Darroch, Ken Hall, Hywel Maggs, Allan Perkins. **Highland** Ms Yvonne Brown, Ray Collier, Mrs Lynda Graham, Duncan MacDonald, David Pierce, Richard Prentice, Michael Scott. **Lothian** Sylvia Bates, Paul Burns, Ms Susan Carpenter, Ms Barbara Cartwright, Graham and Lesley Checkley, Mrs Lesley Fairweather, Michael Hannam, Stuart Housden, Robbie MacGregor, James McGillivray, Mrs Felicity McKay, Allan McRae, Norman Milligan, William Scott, A C Seymour, Ms Maggie Sheddan, James Smith, Michael Tilbury, John Wallace. **Stewartry** Edward Cowley, E H Green, Dr Beryl Hamilton, Mrs Kristin Parry. **Tayside** Ms Hilary Anderson, William Berry. **No branch** Michael Gear (Appin). **South of the Border** Richard Barnsdale (Beckenham), Miss Susan Byron (Lewes), Michael Crane (Brighton), Thomas Gibson (Leek), Trevor Jones (Machynlleth), Mrs Barbara Long (Hexham), C J Oversby (Blackburn). **Overseas** Joseph DiConstanzo (New York, USA).

Vacancies on Council

In November 2003, Mark Holling will take over from Ian Andrews as Club President, and Alastair Lavery will retire after five years on Council. Two posts on Council therefore become vacant at this time. Nominations are sought for Vice President (not necessarily from current Council membership) and one elected Council post (or two if the Vice President is elected from the current Council membership). Please send nominations, signed by the proposer and seconder, to HQ no later than 31st July 2003.

New Member for SBRC

One member of Scottish Birds Records Committee retires annually by rotation and Ian Andrews is due to retire this year. Nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to Ron Forrester by 31st Aug 2003, signed by a proposer and seconder who must both be SOC members. If there is more than one nomination a postal ballot will take place in which all SOC Local Recorders will have one vote.

To ensure that there is a replacement, SBRC always puts forward a nomination. On this occasion Dr Chris J McInerny is our

candidate. Chris, who has lived in Edinburgh and now Glasgow, is well known in Scottish birding circles, being particularly interested in skuas, terns and gulls. He has experience of all the species on the SBRC List and has travelled extensively abroad, seeing over 4,000 species. Additional nominations should be sent to Ron Forrester, Secretary SBRC, The Gables, Eastlands Road, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 9JZ.

New Highland Recorder

Due to increasing work commitments, Colin Crooke is stepping down as Highland Recorder after 12 years service, for which the Club and local birders are very grateful. Please send all Highland records (Inverness-shire, Ross-shire and Sutherland) for 2002 onwards to the new recorder: Alastair F McNee, Liathach, 4 Balnafettack Place, Inverness, IV3 8TQ. Tel: 01463 220493. E-mail: aj.mcnee@care4free.net

Records for 2002

Now is the time to send your 2002 records to the Local Recorders. If you were lucky enough to have found any rarities, the various Records Committees will welcome descriptions. SBRC is particularly keen to fully document the 2002 Rosy Starling influx.

Scottish Bird Report 2000

The 2000 *SBR* is enclosed with this mailing. We apologise for the lateness of this report. It was delayed to allow us to include records from two major regions whose local reports were not available until recently.

Waterston House Update

The design and legal work required for Waterston House, the new Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre at Aberlady, East Lothian, has progressed steadily since its endorsement at the AGM. Preliminary budgets and drawings have also been produced and discussed within the Property Working Group, Management Committee and Council. It is hoped that a Planning Application will be submitted in April. The building should be around 330 sq metres and have outstanding views to the northeast over the bay.

I have had positive meetings with community representatives in Aberlady and have also had encouraging meetings with potential private-sector funders whose businesses have a significant East Lothian content. In addition, meetings will shortly be held with the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland to assess the chances of support for the Library and Archive which we would like to include as part of the centre.

The budget for the building, its facilities and design etc, is likely to be around £750,000. Hopefully, at least £250,000 will come from outwith the SOC Property Endowment Fund. By midsummer we should have a pretty good idea about the fundraising prospects. If the chances of getting external funding are deemed to be unduly risky, the scale of the project may have to be trimmed back or the fundraising period extended.

The next *SBN* will carry an artist's impression and plans and elevations of the Centre which will be submitted for the Planning Application. The next update will also describe the benefits that such a centre will deliver, not just on-site at Aberlady, but also how it can be the hub of a network encompassing everyone in the birding community in Scotland and reaching out to bring new people into birding. If you would like further details on our progress please contact HQ. I plan to visit most, if not all, the SOC Branches over the autumn and winter sessions of 2003/4 to keep members informed.

Bill Gardner

Computer Problems at HQ

Despite taking all the recommended precautions, the SOC's main computer was recently plagued by a very insidious virus. The situation proved difficult to rectify and we apologise if our service to members was affected. To help remedy the situation a new computer has been added to the office network which is more secure. Our thanks go to the 200 Club for the £1,000 they donated towards this. Daphne's hard work in running this fundraising venture is much appreciated.

200 Club

The Oct 2002 to Feb 2003 winners were:

Oct **1st** £30 Mrs E Russell **2nd** £20 J N Schofield **3rd** £10 Mr and Mrs Hogg.

Nov **1st** £150 Miss McCulloch **2nd** £75 P J Sellar **3rd** £50 I L Hopkins **4th** £30 Mr M Kerrod **5th** £20 W G Prest **6th** £10 M Holling.

Dec **1st** £30 I M Darling **2nd** £20 Mr and Mrs Hogg **3rd** £10 C McClellan.

Jan **1st** £30 S F Jackson **2nd** £20 B Pirie **3rd** £10 R S Smith.

Feb **1st** £30 R B Tozer **2nd** £20 T C Johnson-Fergusson **3rd** £10 A D McNeill.

There are presently 187 members. The "new year" starts in June and new members would be very welcome. Please contact me at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Speakers for winter talks

HQ would be pleased to hear of anyone willing and able to talk to one or more SOC branches during the forthcoming sessions. Please contact Caroline if you know of anyone or are prepared to talk yourself.

Conference Working Group

The current members of the Conference Working Group (Caroline Scott and Vicky McLellan) are asking for other helpers to join and help organise the Annual Conference for one or more years. Please contact Caroline if you are interested.

SOC eNewsletter

A reminder that the SOC has set up a members' e-mail Group with Yahoo! Groups. This will act as an electronic newsletter to keep members informed of Club news and events before they appear in *SBN*. The eGroup also enables us to let you know when updates have been made to the SOC website. It is free to join and open to all SOC members with access to e-mail. To subscribe, send a blank e-mail to: The-SOC-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or visit the SOC website for more information.

Borders Discussion Group

An SOC Discussion Group for Lothian has been running for many years. The group acts as a forum for local birding issues, is a lobby organisation for local planning issues that may have an impact on birds and birding, acts as a clearinghouse for local birding enquiries, organises local fieldwork, and is a good social night out! The group meets at Newhailes House in Musselburgh. The meetings have a loose agenda of points for discussion, followed by a break for tea and cakes, and usually finish with a round-the-table update on latest bird sightings. Occasionally, guests are invited to give short talks or highlight specific issues.

In view of the continued popularity and success of the Lothian Discussion Group, especially in the organisation of fieldwork projects (in particular *The South East Scotland Breeding Bird Atlas*), it was suggested that a similar group might be set up in the Borders. Indeed, many Borders birders have attended the Lothian meetings for many years. Following consultations in December, an initial meeting took place at Pete Gordon's office at Lindean Mill, between Galashiels and Selkirk. Twelve local birders attended and it was decided that the venue was suitable for this number, although other venues could be used if required.

The timing of meetings was also dealt with and, in order to avoid other events, as well as the Lothian Discussion Group (which takes place on the first Wednesday of the month), we settled on the third Monday of each month, with some adjustments to suit the calendar. The remaining meetings for 2003 will be on 14th April and, after the

summer, 15th September, 20th October, 17th November and 15th December. The meetings are open to anyone with an interest in birds and conservation or who wants to become involved in fieldwork. Like the Lothian meetings, there will be one duty that we must fulfil: everyone must take a turn to do the tea and cakes! Our initial attendance ensured that each of us only has to do this once a year.

We have great hopes for the Borders Discussion Group. If it can emulate the original Lothian Group, then we will do well. SOC members should ask themselves whether such an organisation might take root in their branch? It's not difficult to set up!

Ray Murray
ray.d.murray@ukgateway.net

Breeding Birds Survey

The BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is a nationwide survey of breeding birds using a simple repeat transect method. Many SOC members already take part, but more volunteers are required in Scotland this year. One of the main recent developments is that a set of bird calls/songs tape is now available to new BBS volunteers. This tape deals with the more difficult species found in lowland Britain. A second tape dealing with predominantly upland species is available to those taking on an upland square.

BBS coverage has fallen steadily in Scotland, from over 300 squares in 1998 to only 230 last year. There is, therefore, growing concern that not enough squares are being surveyed in Scotland to monitor the future population trends of some species. BBS is a great way to make your birding more meaningful and enjoyable. It is also, of course, very important that we keep tabs on our birds. If you are able to take part, please contact me. And don't forget there is a free tape for every new participant! All BBS data and results are available to the SOC.

Mike Raven
BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU. Tel: +44(0) 1842 750050
e-mail: mike.raven@bto.org

Sanda Island

Dick and Meg Gannon, the owners of Sanda, have announced that the island is soon to become only the fourth official bird observatory in Scotland. They note that with ringing records stretching back over 30 years, the island is of major importance in the birding world. Full details of the island, the observatory and its work can be obtained from the warden: Rab Morton, c/o Sanda, by Southend, Campbeltown, Argyll PA28 6EN.

24th IOC

At the invitation of the Institute of Avian Research, Vogelwarte Helgoland, Wilhelmshaven, and the Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft, the 24th International Ornithological Congress will be held at the Congress Centrum Hamburg, Germany, on 13th-19th August 2006. For further details, please contact the IOC homepage at http://www.i-o-c.org or the Institute of Avian Research, An der Vogelwarte 21, D-26386 Wilhelmshaven, Germany. E-mail info@I-o-c.org, fax +49 4421 968955.

Fife recorder retires

At the end of 2001, Dougie Dickson indicated he wished to retire from the post of Fife Bird Recorder. He later withdrew his resignation and appointed Davy Ogilvie as Assistant Recorder.

Dougie Dickson, retiring Fife recorder. (Stewart Neilson)

In July 2002, Dougie informed me that he would definitely stand down at the end of the year. Accepting Dougie's recommendation, the Branch appointed Davy as his successor. Both Dougie and Davy attended Fife Branch's first meeting in September. This gave us the opportunity to meet Davy and to thank Dougie for carrying out the role so diligently over the past 18 years. Since Dougie has been Fife Recorder for such a long time I wanted to do more than merely remind SOC members of the change. However, Dougie was in the post well before I became involved in SOC matters and, consequently, I lacked sufficient information to say an effective "thank you" on behalf of members. I asked Dougie for some background, personal thoughts and highlights. I thought his reply made interesting reading.

"When I took over from Ian Cumming as recorder in 1984, there had only been two previous to him, David Oliver and Keith Brockie. In fairness to them, there was no real emphasis in finding rare birds then as there is now, although the '70s produced some stunning rarities in Scotland. Recording in Scotland was a low-key affair and the job of recorder was, it appears, straightforward. The first bird report for Fife was conceived by Chris Smout in 1980 and consisted of a few photocopied sheets with a basic cover and no vignettes. Slowly this got bigger and better as birdwatchers got the message and submitted records for use in the report. Today's Fife Bird Reports are award-winning, with colour spliced throughout and nearly 200 pages of in-depth information and graphs.

There was no Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) when I took on the role of recorder and, indeed, no Fife Bird Club! This seems unimaginable nowadays. Both were formed in the mid-eighties, the latter from an idea by myself in 1985 on my way home from an SOC meeting!

The local records committee was in response to SBRC's desire to view less of the commoner species reported and I was instrumental in formulating the Fife Local Records Committee to adjudicate not only on the local rarities but others not deemed by SBRC as necessary to circulate to them. I served on the Fife Local Records Committee until 1999, at which time I was asked to join SBRC and naturally grabbed at the chance.

Grapevines in the '80s existed to pass on bird news, but you had to be "in the know". There were no pagers, mobile 'phones nor home computers that the average birder could employ, so county lists were much slower to build in those days. The Fife list today stands at 305 and was possibly around the 250 mark in 1984. This figure has been achieved by a determined and more technically-equipped birding fraternity.

Highlights over the past 18 years have been many, but producing the Fife Bird Report for 14 of them has given me a great thrill and inspired me to seek out rare birds as it became apparent that they must be occurring here in Fife. My best finds were undoubtedly all in the '90s in the shape of Little Bunting, Isabelline Shrike, female King Eider, Lesser Grey Shrike and, recently, Great Snipe. My current Fife list stands at 258. Today the job of recorder is an important one. It involves dealing with all three rarities committees and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, as well as providing information to authors of papers and environmental issues. It is also onerous and time consuming but, if it's in your blood, then you will relish it!"

Birding has certainly changed beyond expectations in the last 18 years and Fife has been fortunate in having someone of Dougie's character and diligent application over these years. His time in office has encouraged stability in local recording by developing and maintaining an administration system which has been mirrored by others.

Stewart Neilson
Fife Branch Chairman

CONFERENCE 2002

The SOC's annual conference, which has the reputation of being one of the most friendly and enjoyable of the birdwatchers' get-togethers, took place at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore, on 1st-3rd Nov 2002. Despite a power cut, it was a great success. Our thanks to the organising committee and SOC staff and office bearers for all their hard work and to Janet Crummy, David Clugston, Joan Howie and Peter Rathbone for the following reports. These allow those members who weren't there to share in this highlight of the Club's year.

The Balavil Sport Hotel. (Arthur Kinnear)

Friday evening

After the usual friendly introduction to an SOC conference at the registration table, the 2002 one began in the traditional manner with the members' slide show and photographic competition. Jill Andrews got the evening off to a good start with a nice light touch in her presentation of some of the birds of Jordan, including an interesting description of the types of deserts these birds survive in. Contrary to popular opinion, all deserts do not just consist of fine sand!

Gordon Riddle, who has studied Kestrels in Ayrshire for umpteen years, followed with some lovely shots of Seychelles and Mauritius Kestrels and the very attractive Fairy Terns. But photography in these exotic places does have some slight problems - about 40 mosquito bites on each of Gordon's elbows whilst he tried to hold his camera steady.

There were 19 entrants (eight prints and 11 slides) in the photographic competition. (A plea was made later at the AGM for two competitions in future as it was impossible to judge prints against slides). The results were announced on Sunday after the votes had been counted.

John Savory showed slides of beautiful exotics such as toucans, orchids and colourful tropical butterflies of Ecuador and Galapagos. Of particular interest was the Swallow-tailed Gull of Galapagos. With its large eyes, this gull is unusual in being primarily nocturnal.

Sam Alexander rounded off the evening with photographs of alligators as a complete change to birds! He also suggested that the planned SOC Resource Centre should include a library of photographic records of Scottish habitats and changes in bird populations, such as the growth of the Gannet colony at Troup Head. ***JH***

Saturday

What a nightmare start to the day, with no electricity at the hotel (or the entire Spey valley) due to an overnight landslip which had brought down a pylon. After hasty discussion it was decided to postpone the Saturday morning session, allowing members to go out birding before lunch and, hopefully, get back on track in the afternoon. Perversely, emergency power was restored at about 8.45am but, by then, many people were already out and speakers had been contacted about the changed running order. Starting the conference at 1.15pm was, however, not all bad news as many people got out in the reasonable weather and half-decent light and there were sightings of Crested Tit, Crossbill, Whooper Swan, Golden Eagle, Peregrine and Hen Harrier. A perched Goshawk was a lucky find for one group.

Swallow-tailed Gull, a Galapagos special. (Liz Fraser)

Conference participants (left to right) Harvey Burton, Friederich Cornelius, Barbara Long and Jean Kinnear. (Arthur Kinnear)

After a welcoming address by the President, the programme kicked off with a presentation by Ian Mitchell (JNCC, Aberdeen) of *Seabird 2000*. Some 900 counters took part in this massive survey and inland colonies were included for the first time. There are about 9,000 seabird colonies in Britain, numbering some eight million birds, including most of the world's Bonxies, Northern Gannets and Manx Shearwaters. The government has an obligation to monitor these birds and establish, where appropriate, special protection areas under the EU Wild Birds Directive. Several species have shown a

decline over the past 30 years, notably the once successful Herring Gull which has dropped by 52% to 140,000 pairs. Interestingly, some 20,000 pairs of gulls breed on urban rooftops; Aberdeen has the largest colony totalling an amazing 3,300 pairs.

One of the aims of *Seabird 2000* was to obtain improved estimates of Storm and Leach's Petrel populations as these burrow-nesters are very difficult to census. More accurate figures have been obtained by using playbacks of taped calls from underground burrows over calibration plots on several visits. It is now known that the Storm Petrel is far more numerous in the west of Ireland than in Scotland, although Shetland's Mousa colony numbers about 6,800 birds. There are more Leach's than Storm Petrels on St Kilda, but predation by Bonxies may be in the order of 14,000 birds per year.

Ray Murray was next up and gave a very good PowerPoint presentation entitled "Nuthatches in Scotland, Twelve Years On". (He gave special thanks to a member of the hotel staff who kindly reformatted his data onto compatible discs overnight). The first breeding Nuthatch in Borders was discovered in 1989. The birds are real snobs and like the big country-house estates with mixed deciduous woodland. The population is now about 100 pairs and they are easily found in spring using taped calls and song. It is hoped that they will continue to spread westwards into Clydesdale and maybe further north into the large areas of oak woodland. Mild winters may result in increased survival.

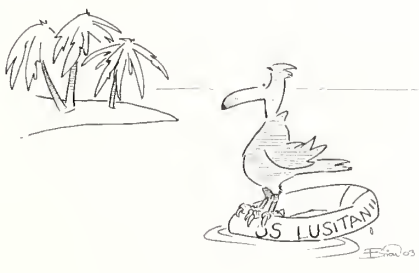
The most unusual and ambitious presentation for many years was provided by Duncan Watt, entitled "Horse of the Woods, the Continuing Celtic Heritage".

The power cut had its bright side - some delegates saw Golden Eagle on Saturday morning. (John Busby)

Caroline Scott watches Duncan Watt at work on his Celtic Capercaillie. (Arthur Kinnear)

Resplendent in tartan Highland dress, Duncan explained the significance of the intricate Celtic knot designs which he uses for his jewellery. One pattern resembles the strutting Capercaillie on its lek. He produced a large white board with the interwoven Celtic design intertwined with a cock Caper. He then proceeded to both paint and talk, a very difficult thing to do in front of an audience. He was very humorous and everyone marvelled at his artistic skills. (I last saw him at gone 12.30am working away on his painting in the hotel foyer).

The final talk of the day, by the familiar figure of Roy Dennis, was entitled "Some Ecological Problems of Living on an Island". This very professional and authoritative talk covered many Highland species and dealt at length with the innate directions taken by Ospreys and Honey Buzzards when leaving Scotland, as discovered by satellite-tracking individuals. The preferred routes of juveniles take them southwest due, it is thought, to the Scandinavian origin of their colonising parents. Unfortunately, they often run foul of adverse easterly weather which pushes them out into the Atlantic and are then probably lost at sea. One well-publicised Honey Buzzard made a truly remarkable journey over the sea, taking some 110 hours and covering about 5,000km before presumably being lost off west Africa. Roy finished the lecture on another important point, urging policy makers to crack on with the big conservation issues and to be much bolder in their approach to the reintroduction of species such as the European Beaver, Wolf and Crane. ***DC***



(Brian Orr)

The 66th AGM

The AGM was fairly short and uncontentious this year. Janet Crummy was elected Honorary Treasurer, with Russell Young elected Honorary Secretary. A ballot to replace Ken Shaw on Council was very close and resulted in Jimmy Maxwell coming out on top.

New Council member Jimmy Maxwell

The meeting was chaired by Ian Andrews, who summed up the changes resulting from decisions made at the last AGM. These included the sale of 21 Regent Terrace, the setting up of the Regional Committee, and the Council decision to move our HQ to Aberlady. Although Bill Gardner had been appointed Development Officer, he had to spend much of his first year on property matters rather than on Club development. He was now preparing a business plan for the new HQ and the Club's future.

The Treasurer stated that the subscriptions would definitely go up for various reasons, including the stock-market fall which meant that our investments had also fallen in value.

A document entitled "The Location of the new HQ and Resource Centre" had been prepared and circulated to delegates. After a member of the Ayr branch stated that to say there was no second runner to

Aberlady was misleading because he believed there was an alternative site in north Ayrshire, the chairman said that any other proposals for a centre other than at Council's chosen destination of Aberlady should be made known to Council. When caution about running costs was raised, the chairman stated that at least £200,000 must be put aside for maintenance. He suggested that some of the interest on that sum could be used for branch help, such as the purchase of hides. (A copy of the official minutes of the AGM and the development document can be obtained from HQ on receipt of a large SAE). ***JH***

Saturday Evening

As usual, the Balavil Hotel gave us an excellent annual dinner. This was followed, by popular demand, by the after-dinner speaker Malcolm Ogilvie. Where does he find his stories? Judging by the laughter (surely not only caused by the fact that most delegates had by then partaken of some liquid refreshment), he will soon be asked to fill this slot again. According to the programme, "entertainment" then followed, Malcolm having pointed out that he, apparently, did not come under this heading! It was good to see that more members than usual took part in the "dancing and prancing" and to discover that we have an Hon Secretary prepared to sing on these occasions (perhaps in celebration of the fact that he had at last been officially elected after having served a year in the post unofficially?!). ***JH***

Sunday

According to the weather forecast, Sunday was meant to be foul, but instead it was a beautiful sunny morning – just right for a wee stroll to clear heads (some of us had had a rather late night and I was woken at 6am when something disturbed the rookery across the road).

Bill Gardner started with a very succinct, clearly expressed presentation, using PowerPoint and video, explaining the reasons for the move from Regent Terrace. He talked about the temporary accommodation at Musselburgh, the hunt for a new site for our HQ and the progress made at Aberlady, the only feasible site so far identified. He outlined what we as a club need in the new building and explained why the Aberlady site was the best – it has excellent year-round birding with diverse habitats (we would have access to the woodlands and ponds of nearby Gosford House, and to the coast for geese, waders and seabirds), and it is accessible by public transport. The John Muir Way runs along the edge of the site. Bill outlined how the project was progressing with the architect and the local planning authority. The main areas planned include the library, lecture /exhibition hall, archive, offices, interpretation and tea/coffee area, plus some interesting landscaping. I feel that at last the Club can look forward to a new era. I think we are decidedly lucky to have Bill, with all his expertise, at the helm of this new venture but, don't worry, as Treasurer I shall keep a watchful eye on the pursestrings!

Angela Hissett and Liz Leyden. (Arthur Kinnear)

We then headed to the Whooper Swans of Caerlaverock and Iceland with Richard Hesketh. He has ringed them in Scotland since 1980 and in Iceland since 1988. He showed us their breeding areas and the difficulties in catching them, despite the birds being in moult! You obviously have to be young, energetic, fit, not worried about getting wet, able to drive an inflatable, prepared to work quickly in wonderful surroundings but not always good weather, endure long working days and, finally, enjoy the comradeship of fellow ringers. He explained how important it is to keep the swan family groups together and release them all at the same time. If they get separated, they could get swept down the fast flowing ice-melt river and might never meet up again. He placed satellite transmitters on some birds to record internal and external temperatures and the altitude. The results showed that most Whoopers fly at more or less sea level but one migrated at 6000ft! One took 11 hours and 20 minutes to travel 1,000km and another sat on the sea when it got too windy to fly in the right direction. One even managed to fly at 60mph for the last leg of its journey to reach Iceland. His maps showed that they do depend on good weather and are often blown off course. It was another fascinating talk.

The next coffee break was the last one in which to buy books from Subbuteo, Second Nature and the SOC. Unfortunately, Charles Frank (optical equipment) wasn't able to come. There were also no artists displaying their work. Personally, I hope this is redressed next year, as I know I'm not the only member who likes to see professional artists' work on show. ***JC***

Immediately following the morning break, David Merrie, the final session chairman, introduced our past president, Ian Darling, who has enjoyed a love affair with the Isle of May over many years. Ian brought us up to date with happenings on this tiny island in 2001 and 2002 and dwelt briefly on its ornithological history. Migration is the principal interest of most visitors, but seabird biology is a serious part of the island's long-term research. This has revealed that Fulmar, Guillemot and Razorbill numbers increased between 1981 and 2001, but there has been an alarming crash in Kittiwake and Shag. In 2002, four tern species had no breeding success whatsoever. Seabird passage can be quite spectacular, with 1,000 Little Auks streaming past on 7th Dec 2001 and over 600 of both Manx and Sooty Shearwaters passing by on successive days that year.

Spring migration often produces unusual occurrences such as 25 Tree Sparrows appearing one day, quite incredible for a bird not generally regarded as a long-distance migrant. Other notable spring species were Wryneck, Red-rumped

Swallow and Ortolan Bunting. Autumn excitement included Icterine and Barred Warblers and Red-breasted Flycatcher. The island can also boast firsts for Britain, including Siberian Thrush in October 1954. Altogether, the Isle of May is a delightful place to visit and Ian left us in no doubt as to why he makes regular pilgrimages to this birding Mecca.

The final speaker for the Sunday morning session was the well-travelled and popular Angus Hogg, who thrilled the audience with some of his "Mediterranean Magic". He first took us to Mallorca, one of the more accessible islands in the Med where spring migration can provide a breath-taking assortment of species. He covered many well-known hotspots, mentioning local specialities such as Audouin's Gull, Marmora's Warbler, Thekla Lark and the most beautiful of all falcons - Eleanora's. Mallorca is changing rapidly, with much construction to accommodate more and more tourists. This places great pressure on bird habitats, many of which have already been lost since Eddie Watkinson placed the island on the birding map in the 1970s with his *Guide to Bird-watching in Mallorca*. Nevertheless, it still has much to offer the visiting birder, but don't leave it too long before a visit.

Angus then moved us to the colourful and historical island of Cyprus where, despite an estimated nine million birds falling victim to hunting each year, there is still much to see. Paphos in the west is a perfect area to observe arriving migrants such as Eastern Bonelli's Warblers and the occasional rarity such as Caspian Plover. Kremmos dam and the Phassouri reed beds were mentioned as good spots for Little Crake and White Stork, respectively. Cyprus Wheatears are summer visitors, breeding only on the island and nowhere else. Together with Masked Shrikes, Great Spotted Cuckoos and Cyprus Warblers, they help to swell the number of sought-after breeding species. Raptors are also an important group, with Griffon Vultures, Red-footed and Eleanora's Falcons featuring prominently. Long-legged Buzzards have been noted recently and may well become a regular visitor. Cyprus has much to offer the birdwatcher with the opportunity for cultural visits to historical sites and for sunny relaxation on some very beautiful beaches. ***PR***

Final thoughts

The whole conference went smoothly with a very friendly atmosphere. The working group who organised the speakers, the SOC staff who organised the logistics, and the speakers themselves all helped to ensure that it did. The hotel staff was completely unflappable when the power went off and we even woke to the tantalising smell of frying bacon! It was great to see all those weel kent faces (even if I can't put names to all of them!). I really enjoy our conferences, not just for the superb talks but for the social aspect. People let their hair down and seem very different from when you meet them in the office or at meetings! Conversation ranged from local Scottish birds to exotic holidays and certainly, when I looked round, there were lots of smiling faces - a good sign of a successful conference. Thank you to all who organised even one wee aspect of it, and to all who came to make it so enjoyable. ***JC***

The conference produced a varied, informative and often stimulating collection of presentations, most, but not all, falling within the island theme. The reinstatement of the after-dinner entertainment slot was welcomed by all, Malcolm Ogilvie rising to the occasion with a delightful and amusing account of his Barnacle Goose family and their journey south to winter on Islay. Finally, a heartfelt word of thanks must got to Eddie, the hotel manager, and his dedicated staff. The loss of power on Saturday morning would have thrown lesser mortals into full panic mode, but they dealt with the problem as though it was something that happened very week! ***PR***

I was particularly impressed with the calmness and professionalism of our speakers and the hotel staff after the potentially disastrous power failure. I understand that Roy Dennis was off to Australia the next morning. So instead of working with his sheep after his talk he had to go home in the morning, then come back again to Newtonmore to speak to us as late as 4.45pm! His timing and the length of his talk were absolutely spot on! Everyone I've spoken to said that it had been another very friendly and enjoyable conference (and most were folk who would certainly say if they had not liked something...!). ***JH***

Photographic Competition

There were many outstanding entries to the annual photographic competition. The photographs were put to the vote at the Conference and the results were as follows:
1st Swallow by David Callan, Ayr (see p. 3).
2nd Stonechat by Harry Scott, Aboyne (left).
3rd Greenshank by Sam Alexander, Cults (below).
Congratulations to the winners and many thanks to everyone who entered. We look forward to next year's competition being bigger than ever!

Stonechat (Harry Scott)

Greenshank (Sam Alexander)

Aberlady Bay - the Middle Ages

*This article follows Keith Macgregor's account of the bay in the 1950s (*SBN *65). We hope to bring you up to date with the birds and birders of one of Scotland's top sites in future issues.*

A dream come true! Imagine being a birdwatcher and nature lover all your life, then being given the chance to be warden of a nature reserve like Aberlady Bay. This opportunity came my way in the spring of 1974 when Des Norden, the summer warden for a few years, decided to try something new, giving me the chance to take over.

Accommodation at that time was non-existent, so I pitched my tent each evening for several weeks near the sewage plant, then decamped each morning before the public arrived. There were times during inclement weather when I actually slept inside the sewage works building or, if he caught me before I had moved in for the night, at the home of Archie Mathieson, the East Lothian Country Ranger.

Eventually, I was upgraded to a caravan tucked away beside one of the Sea Buckthorn spinnies. There it (and I) remained for five years, and it became a good stopping-off coffee-shop for many a weary birder. Some old railway sleepers were dug in hard against the sides of the caravan to keep it upright in the westerly gales and an old tin of battleship-grey paint washed-up on the tideline was put to good use, blending my new home in with the Buckthorn.

I had always wanted to live an inch or so from nature and over the years recorded 119 species from my caravan. These included such wonderful birds as Red-backed Shrike, Demoiselle Crane, Marsh Harrier and Short-eared Owl (I remember a member of the public disturbing 11 of these birds as he wandered off the path!). My birdtable attracted many local birds, but the best had to be a Long-eared Owl which was nesting in my Buckthorn spinney. The "squeaky gate" calls of the young birds kept me awake at night. A Golden Oriole also sang from the spinney. As I went to investigate, it flew out and the birdwatchers outside had great views while I was stuck in the bushes! A Sparrowhawk once landed on my skylight for a few minutes, enabling me to observe parts of that species I had never seen before. The skylight later blew off during one particularly bad gale. A Wheatear also paid me a visit, but this time it came down the chimney which saved me from having to get the flue swept. I believe that this bird was attracted to the caravan as I was

The caravan by the buckthorn spinney, the warden's home for five years. (Russell Nisbet)

Curlew and Bar-tailed Godwits, typical Aberlady waders. (John Busby)

typing a report at the time and, in retrospect, the *chack* of the old-fashioned keys did sound "Wheaterish"!

I met many wonderful characters during my years at the bay, which became a full-time job in 1975. Perhaps the best known was Nigel Tranter who, when I first saw him, was walking smartly but stopping every now and then to take down a few notes. He had a pair of binoculars around his neck and I was wondering what birds he was noting down. It was only later that I learnt that this was the way in which he wrote his historical novels.

Gerry Sandeman was another great character, with his long raincoat and umbrella, notebook and pencil. I could take a day off when he was around. I also met a young birdwatcher by the name of Mike Fraser, but the least said about that the better, except perhaps that in my first annual report there is an entry stating "Wryneck. One sighted near Gullane Point on 4th September by Mike Fraser of Dirleton."

My main work as warden was to protect the wildlife of the reserve and, at the time, the nesting terns were very important. On 7th June 1974, 72 nests of Common and Arctic Terns were counted, along with 14 Little Tern nests. The following morning the colony was robbed. It is possible that our activity counting the colony the previous day had given the young egg-thieves the

idea. I organised a "Tern Watch" each year thereafter and made many friends in the local SOC and RSPB who came along to help. I actually camped inside the roped-off nesting area during the egg-laying season. Luckily we had no more real trouble of the human kind, but high tides and sandblasting took a heavy toll of eggs and chicks in later years. We tried moving nests and even putting some in car tyres, but with little success.

Initially, Aberlady Bay was used by school groups and I went out to schools to give talks. This was ended, however, when it was agreed that the Bay should be left as undisturbed as possible. For this reason the carpark was never extended. Nigel Tranter's "Footbridge to Enchantment" was once washed away and this certainly controlled visitors to a great extent. However, when it was in place we conducted a visitor survey on two August days in 1974. We found that 512 people visited the reserve of whom only 30% were there to study natural history and around 40% were visiting for the first time.

Another very important species was the Pink-footed Goose. In 1974, around 3,000 birds came in to roost during the winter months, but by 1980 double that number was recorded. I remember one incident with John Arnott of the BBC Radio Natural History Department. I was due to talk about the geese flighting into the mudflats, but on the appointed day the geese arrived early and had beaten us to it. Unfazed, John asked me to describe the scene even although the birds were already happily ensconced on the mud. It was fun to hear the programme "Afield" the following week with the *oink oinks* dubbed in!

During my five years at the bay I had some great birdwatching experiences. On 15th May 1974 a friend, Angus Maciver, came across from Falkirk to look for the Buff-breasted Sandpiper which had been around for about a week. While looking for it, the first Red Kite for the reserve flew over our heads towards Kilspindie. In midwinter a few of us, including Stuart Ward, Fred Petersen and Philip Wilson, used to wait until dusk to watch out for a male Hen Harrier to come in to roost and, if we were lucky, we would also see a group of Corn Buntings doing the same thing. They would first alight on a Hawthorn bush, then drop out of sight into the tall grass. The Whooper Swans were also worth waiting for as they came "whooping" down the Peffer Burn and over the timber bridge before settling in the Bay. A Lapland Bunting on the golf course was also memorable, as was the trip of four Dotterel which flew swiftly over the mudflats, calling as they went.

Aberlady was not all about birds, of course, and it became an SSSI chiefly because of its fantastic flora. I still visit the reserve at least twice a year just to have a look at the Viper's Bugloss, Cowslips, White Bryony, Black Horehound, Houndstongue and Grass of Parnassus. Which reminds me of the time I was taking a group around and pointing out this lovely white flower growing in the dune slacks. I must have slurred the name as the group ended up looking for an insect instead of a plant because they thought I had said "Grasshopper Nassus"!

I would regularly record 18 species of mammal, with Roe Deer being quite common, and with Hedgehog being a bit

The author in his Aberlady days. (Photographer unknown)

of a pest at the tern colony. Another pest on the shingle spit was the hunting Kestrel. Willie Watt, the local gamekeeper who used to help look after the terns, often threatened to bring down his gun for a pot-shot at it.

It would take a whole issue of *SBN* to tell all the stories and incidents of my time at Aberlady Bay but, in essence, I spent six of the best years of my life there living as close to nature as I possibly could and meeting scores of friends, many of whom I still see to this day. Let's hope that it remains unspoilt so that future generations can enjoy the feeling of wilderness so close to the central belt of a Scotland.

Russell G Nisbet

The "Footbridge to Enchantment" across the Peffer Burn. (Russell Nisbet)

Birds of the Manor Valley

Recording birds in the Manor Valley is part of a wider wildlife survey that I have been carrying out for three years to determine the distribution, habitats, population sizes and trends of birds, mammals, flowering plants and ferns. By 2002 the list of birds recorded in the valley had reached 103 species.

Situated in the western part of Borders Region, the Manor Valley is bounded by some of the highest hills in southern Scotland, including Dollar Law (817m). At the northern end of the valley the Manor Water joins the Tweed just west of Peebles at an elevation of 160m. The valley is roughly 15km long and has an area of 75km^2. Habitats are dominated by heather moorland, mostly fairly dry, although the ridge-tops tend to be peaty. The steepest slopes have scree whereas moderate slopes may have extensive bracken. The lower slopes and valley bottom contain improved, enclosed agricultural land, mostly permanent pasture with little arable. There are three large middle-aged conifer plantations and a large number of small but mainly mature woods which are mixed or broadleaved in the lower part of the valley and almost wholly coniferous in the upper valley. Farming is dominated by sheep grazing, with an apparently increasing number of suckler-cattle herds. Two large estates impinge on the valley and engage in Pheasant-shooting in the woods and Grouse-shooting on the heather moors.

Apart from Red Grouse, the heather moorland is home to few birds. The relatively scarce Black Grouse share their time between heather and young conifers. Golden Plovers breed on the peaty summits, whereas Ring Ouzels seem to nest in the steepest heather mixed with scree while feeding in nearby grassland. Merlins also nest on moorland. On the slopes, Stonechats are more likely to be found in heather, Whinchats in bracken and Wheatears, Skylarks and Meadow Pipits in rough grassland. Of the last five species, only a few Stonechats remain to eke out a living through the winter. The Meadow Pipit seems to be the host of choice of our few Cuckoos.

The small conifer woods and larger plantations harbour a range of species. Siskins, Lesser Redpolls and Common Crossbills are present in small numbers and Mistle and Song Thrushes nest in the woods but feed mainly in adjacent grassland, the latter leaving in the autumn. Although Goldcrest, Willow Warbler, Robin, Wren, Coal Tit and Chaffinch are also found in other habitats, they are present in large numbers here. Buzzards nest in these woods and hunt over all open habitats. This is also probably where most of the Woodcocks are to be found.

Skylarks are found in the valley's rough grassland. (John Busby)

The Manor Valley from Cademuir, looking south. (Graham Pyatt)

The broadleaved and mixed woods of the lower half of the valley contain many species, such as Blackbird, Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, Treecreeper and Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits. Also residing here are most of the Tawny Owls, Dunnocks, Redstarts, Blackcaps and Whitethroats. The Nuthatch is expanding its range in the Borders and has reached the outskirts of the valley. There has been one sighting of a Hawfinch and possibly only one of a Jay in Manor. Birds that breed in the woods but hunt or forage elsewhere include Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Starling, Rook, Carrion Crow and the very common Woodpigeon.

Although the Manor Water and its tributaries occupy a small proportion of the land area, much bird life is found along them. The watercourses and floodplains provide a variety of localised habitats: the water itself, gravel spreads, small ponds and marshes, streamside trees and scrub and, in places, relatively ungrazed herbaceous vegetation. Characteristic resident species are Dipper, Moorhen and Grey Heron (which nests in the conifers). A small number of Teal breeds here, supplemented by an influx of wintering birds. Pied and Grey Wagtails, Goosanders and Mallards are present for most of the year. Altitudinal migrants which come to breed include Redshank, Lapwing and Oystercatcher. One pair of Ringed Plovers reared several chicks last year. After arrival, Curlews assemble in one or two flocks near the water but disperse over a wide range of altitudes to breed. Sand Martins have several breeding colonies in the banks of the Tweed and Manor Water. One or two colonies of Black-headed Gulls seem to choose different ponds to nest beside each year. A pair of Kingfishers has been seen on the Manor Water in the late summer this year. They are also seen on the Tweed near Manorwaterfoot and may breed there. A few Swifts feed along the watercourses but may only be paying us day-visits from Peebles. Marshes at all altitudes may hold Snipe, but the largest numbers occur in the valley bottoms. Birds that are mainly found in the trees or scrub close to the streams include Sedge Warbler, Reed Bunting and Spotted Flycatcher, although the flycatcher also finds gardens congenial. Other rather scarce scrub-dwellers, not necessarily associated with watercourses, include Garden Warbler, Yellowhammer and Bullfinch. Substantial flocks of Goldfinch gather in autumn to feed on thistles and burdocks.

One of the Manor's side valleys in winter. (Graham Pyatt)

Farm steadings, together with other buildings, hold their own characteristic birds, such as resident House Sparrow, Feral Pigeon and Barn Owl and migrant House Martin and Swallow. Linnets seem to share their time between roadsides, steadings and riverside scrub but seem to leave us for the winter. Greenfinches are seen throughout the year, but are more visible outside the breeding season.

Among the winter visitors on the Tweed we can expect a pair of Little Grebes for a long stay and a Cormorant for a short stay. Small numbers of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese may also drop in unexpectedly for a day or two. Up to 1,000 Common Gulls make daily visits between July and March, perhaps from West Water Reservoir near West Linton, but disappear for their three-month breeding season. During summer their place is taken by a much smaller number of non-breeding Lesser Black-backed and a few Greater Black-backed Gulls.

Tawny Owl chick. Up to five pairs may breed in the Manor Valley. (Graham Pyatt)

We can expect more than one large flock of Fieldfares to pass the winter here, sharing their time between pasture, woods and berry-bearing scrub. The most important extent of scrub lies along the derelict railway line following the Tweed; this is also the best place to look for Redwings. Occasionally, large flocks of Bramblings, accompanied by Chaffinches, presumably also with Nordic accents, descend on the few fields of brassica stubble.

Finally, a note about the population estimates given in the Table. Wherever possible these are based on local observations, but for the most abundant species resort has had to be made to the methods used in *The Breeding Birds of South East Scotland*. Although many of the estimates may be very inaccurate, it will be a measure of the success of the survey if, in the next few years, much firmer numbers can be offered. Species for which no estimate can be offered at present, or for which estimates are meaningless, are left blank.

Graham Pyatt
d.g.pyatt@manorvalley.demon.co.uk

Table 1. Birds of the Manor Valley. Names in bold are confirmed or likely breeding species. Numbers considered fairly accurate are bold, those based on *The Breeding Birds of South East Scotland* are in *italics*. All figures are pairs, apart from * which are individuals.

Little Grebe	**1**
Cormorant	
Grey Heron	**7**
Mute Swan	
Pink-footed Goose	
Greylag Goose	
Teal	**20**
Mallard	**20**
Goosander	**3**
Sparrowhawk	**2**
Buzzard	**10**
Kestrel	**5**
Merlin	**2**
Red Grouse	100
Black Grouse	**25**
Red-legged Partridge	
Grey Partridge	
Pheasant	
Moorhen	**10**
Coot	
Oystercatcher	**50**
Ringed Plover	**1**
Golden Plover	10
Lapwing	**50**
Common Snipe	30
Woodcock	10
Curlew	**40**
Redshank	**3**
Dotterel	
Common Sandpiper	**30**
Black-headed Gull	**40**
Common Gull	**1000***
Lesser Black-backed Gull	**150***
Great Black-backed Gull	**5***
Feral Pigeon	**20**
Stock Dove	
Woodpigeon	**200**
Collared Dove	5
Cuckoo	3
Barn Owl	2
Tawny Owl	5
Short-eared Owl	
Swift	
Kingfisher	**1**
Green Woodpecker	**4**
Great Spotted Woodpecker	**7**
Skylark	20
Sand Martin	**50**
Swallow	**100**
House Martin	**100**
Tree Pipit	
Meadow Pipit	*1500*
Grey Wagtail	**10**
Pied Wagtail	**20**
Dipper	**20**
Wren	*500*
Dunnock	*100*
Robin	*400*
Redstart	5
Whinchat	**10**
Stonechat	**10**
Wheatear	**20**
Ring Ouzel	5
Blackbird	50
Fieldfare	
Song Thrush	20
Redwing	
Mistle Thrush	20
Sedge Warbler	**2**
Common Whitethroat	**1**
Garden Warbler	**5**
Blackcap	**10**
Wood Warbler	
Willow Warbler	*500*
Goldcrest	*1000*
Spotted Flycatcher	**10**
Long-tailed Tit	**5**
Coal Tit	*300*
Blue Tit	*400*
Great Tit	*200*
Nuthatch	
Treecreeper	10
Magpie	**1**
Jay	
Jackdaw	50
Rook	**400**
Hooded/hybrid Crow	
Carrion Crow	50
Raven	3
Starling	100
House Sparrow	**40**
Chaffinch	*500*
Brambling	200
Greenfinch	50
Goldfinch	50
Siskin	*100*
Linnet	**15**
Lesser Redpoll	20
Common Crossbill	5
Bullfinch	5
Hawfinch	
Yellowhammer	2
Reed Bunting	1

What is happening to Canna seabirds?

Shags have experienced almost complete breeding failures in the past two years. (Bob Swann)

Regular readers of *SBN* will know that members of the Highland Ringing Group have been monitoring seabird numbers and breeding success on the Isle of Canna for more than 30 years. The international importance of the island's seabird colonies is shown by its designation as a Special Protection Area, most notably for its large Shag colonies. During the early years of the study, from 1970 up to the mid 1980s, rapid increases in the numbers of breeding Shags, gulls and auks were observed. There then followed a period of steady decline of all species until the early 1990s when numbers of Guillemots, Shags and Kittiwakes began to increase again. Although Guillemots and Kittiwakes continue to do well, the last two years have seen a rapid decline in the numbers of breeding Shags and gulls, accompanied by breeding failures.

For a number of years we had been noticing changes taking place at specific colonies on the island. First of all, during the 1980s we witnessed the sudden collapse of the Manx Shearwater colony along the Tarbert Road. From a population of over 1,500 pairs in the 1970s and early 1980s we suspect that only a handful now nests on Canna in steep, inaccessible gullies. An increase in predation, particularly by rats, was suspected to be the cause of the collapse.

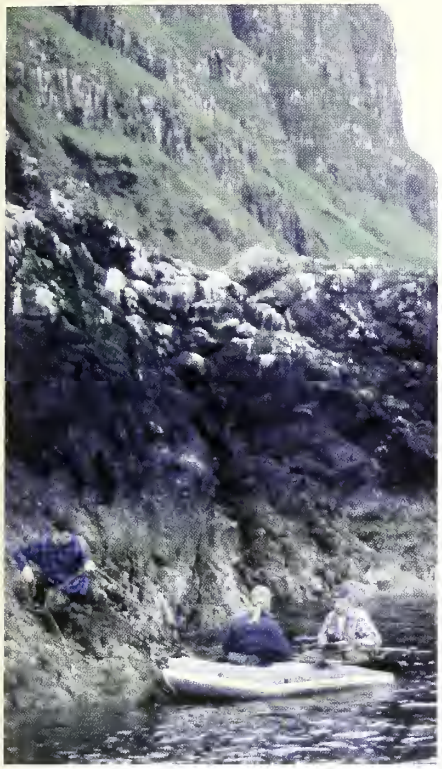
In the early 1990s we began to notice declines in the numbers of Razorbills and Guillemots nesting under boulders at the Nunnery colony. In addition, the Shags began to redistribute themselves, switching from boulder sites to more open sites on narrow cliff ledges. We suspected that these changes were due to an increase in predation, with mammals, again most likely rats, being the prime suspects. By the late 1990s the large colony at Garrisdale had lost all of its Razorbills and most Shags nesting on the periphery of the colony were beginning to fail.

Canna has one of the largest Shag colonies in the British Isles, with the birds concentrated in four main sub-colonies. A slight increase had taken place from 1993-1998, after which numbers began to decline. This was combined with an increasing number of failures at the colonies at Nunnery and Garrisdale. The situation in 2001 and 2002 was, however, absolutely dire. The table shows there was an almost complete failure at the Nunnery and Lamasgor colonies in both years. Surviving nests were restricted to inaccessible (to us) cliff ledges or deep recesses under large boulders at the top of the colony, furthest from the shore. At Garrisdale all nests failed except for a small section in the core of the colony where breeding success was as normal. Despite the catastrophic breeding failure at these three colonies in both years the large colony at Geugasgor has had normal breeding success. This colony is the most inaccessible of the four, being positioned on a raised wave-cut platform below 600ft sheer cliffs, making access difficult both from the shore or hinterland.

Climbing up the steep slopes at Lamasgor. (Bob Swann)

Table 1. Estimated productivity of Shag colonies on Canna in 2001 and 2002.

	2001			2002		
Colony	**No. of nests**	**Estimated no. young fledged**	**Mean no. young fledged**	**No. of nests**	**Estimated no. young fledged**	**Mean no. young fledged**
Lamasgor	139	11	0.1	58	23	0.4
Nunnery	63	19	0.3	49	18	0.4
Garrisdale	214	88	0.4	141	89	0.6
Geugasgor	334	582	1.7	328	479	1.5



Researchers landing on the north side of Canna. (Bob Swann)

Gulls have also begun to decline in numbers in recent years on Canna, but the breeding seasons of 2001 and 2002 were characterised by major breeding failures. Early visits to the island in 2001 revealed that Herring Gulls were not having a good season with many nests empty, having either failed or not even been laid in. On our return visit in July we discovered that all the colonies on the west half of the island had totally failed to rear chicks, whilst those on the eastern half had fared slightly better, although productivity was well below average. In 2002 the situation was even worse, with a total failure in virtually all colonies. We estimated that only about 60 chicks fledged from over 800 pairs in 2002. In both years failures tended to occur at the egg or very small chick stage.

Great Black-backed Gulls were also struggling. In 1999 and 2001, respectively, 1.1 and 1.3 chicks fledged per pair. In 2001 this dropped to 0.34 chicks per each of 32 monitored pairs and 2002 was even worse with only two chicks fledged by 32 pairs (0.06 chicks per pair).

What are the likely causes of these problems? The poor breeding performance of gulls during 2001 and 2002 may be related to a decline in the local prawn fishery in both years. In the early part of the season there was very little fishing activity around Canna. The large Herring Gull population that has built up on the island is very dependent on discards from this fishery and may be at an artificially high level. The lack of discards may have prevented some birds nesting and caused those that did to fail early in the breeding season. Many turned to other food sources such as shellfish and probably also started to prey upon the nests of other seabirds adjacent to their colonies. At the Lamasgor colony in 2001 large numbers of Shag eggs were found in open sites amongst the boulders with a groove along their long axis. We suspect these had been removed from the nests by gulls.

The fact that the Shags at Geugasgor and those in inaccessible sites continue to have "normal" breeding success suggests that it is not food shortage that is causing the breeding failures. Canna Shags feed predominately on sandeels and gadoids. Guillemots and Kittiwakes, which feed on the same species, continue to do well, suggesting that there is no shortage of these fish. The failures affecting the Shags must therefore be related to predation. The gulls have already been implicated in this, but increased mammal predation cannot be ruled out. In early 2002, Clive Craik visited the island to see if there was any evidence of Mink. Thankfully he found none.

The National Trust for Scotland, which owns Canna, is concerned about our worries and, fearful of the total extinction of the Manx Shearwaters on the island, has recently undertaken surveys of the island's rat population. These have shown that even in mid-winter the population is very large and widespread. In the 1970s and early '80s the locals believed that the rats were knocked back each year by severe winter weather and were restricted to the shore and settled areas where many were killed by poison campaigns. The recent spell of mild winters may have resulted in the rat population increasing substantially.

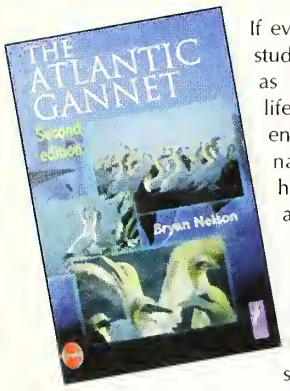
We hope that the situation will improve in 2003. If, however, these massive breeding failures continue and if they spread into the large Geugasgor colony, where most of the island's auks also nest, then it will be necessary to take more direct action. Video cameras could be installed in the colony to assess why nests are failing. If it is confirmed that rats are found to be the culprits a major predator-control scheme, involving the controlled use of poison, will be necessary to protect the birds in this internationally important seabird site. The National Trust for Scotland is currently drawing up a proposal to look for funding to start control measures.

Bob Swann
bob.swann@freeuk.com

Canna's Manx Shearwater population has declined drastically since the 1970s. (John Busby)

REVIEWS

The Atlantic Gannet by Bryan Nelson. 2002. Fenix Books Ltd/Scottish Seabird Centre. 396 pp, numerous maps, colour and b&w photos, drawings and graphics by John Busby. ISBN 0-9541191-0-X. Hbk. £24.50



If every bird was as well studied and documented as the Atlantic Gannet, life would be even more enjoyable and illuminating for everyone hungry for information about birds.

Bryan Nelson's new edition of his long out-of-print monograph is a superb book for anyone interested in seabirds in general, and gannets in particular. It has been extensively redesigned with a host of new photography, updated text and data on every aspect of the Gannet. The new additional photographs make the contents even more accessible and understandable, along with Bryan's easy-to-read prose. The mass of tables, graphs and diagrams gives the reader additional analytical information along with useful chapters on "Gannet and Man" and updated counts of all known Atlantic Gannet colonies.

The book also includes new material on Gannets at sea and their foraging activities gathered by satellite telemetry. Bryan continues to enjoy the privilege of having John Busby as illustrator for the book. Surely no one can better capture Gannets in flight.

If it has any fault, it is at the end of the book where the original index of eight pages from the first edition has been reduced to a slim three-and-a-half pages which, for a monograph of this stature, is inadequate. Nevertheless, I can thoroughly recommend it and congratulate Bryan and all at the Fenix Press for a terrific book.

Bill Gardner

A Guide to Bird Watching in the Clyde Area. (undated). Edited by Cliff Baister and Marion Osier. 148 pp. Available from the SOC Clyde branch or RSPB Lochwinnoch.

This splendid ring-bound booklet is an attractive and easily used guide to the important sites within the Clyde recording area. It includes some 42 maps and line drawings by Thelma Sykes. The Clyde area habitats are described by Chris Waltho in a six-page chapter. The bulk of this booklet deals with seven main areas and explains in some detail access to each site and the birds to be expected at various seasons of the year. Even if you think you know all the best places to birdwatch in the area, I am sure the clear information relating to some less familiar sites to be of value to a wide range of birders.

David Clugston

Birds of Colonsay & Oronsay by David Jardine. ISBN 1-899863-32-X. £5.99.

This is not intended to replace the 1986 publication of the same title, but to update it in the light of changes occurring in the meantime (eg the increase in the population of Choughs compared to that of Hooded Crows). However, like the earlier volume, it gives advice on walks round promising bird watching sites.

Colonsay is probably the least easy to reach of the inhabited Inner Hebrides, but is well worth it when you get there. It is a manageable size on bicycle and foot, has some good beaches (but the water is *cold*!), and plenty of birds. In particular, it is the easiest place in Scotland to find Choughs (see also *SB* 22:2). Oronsay is even harder to get to, requiring a low tide walk over the Strand (made even wetter if it is raining and windy), but the RSPB is endeavouring to manage it for Corncrake. I fear we did not encounter any when we were there, but it was a foul day. This wee book, written by someone with deep knowledge of the islands, would be invaluable to anyone visiting them.

The book is available from the author at House of Lochar, Isle of Colonsay, Argyll PA61 7YR. Tel. 01951 200232. e-mail lochar@colonsay.org.uk.

John G Davies

Fife Bird Report 2001. Compiled and edited by D E Dickson. Fife Bird Club.

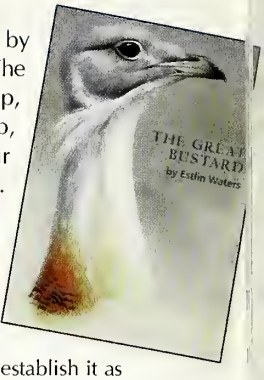
The Fife Bird Club's reports over the years have consistently improved and culminated in grand fashion in 2000 in being voted as the best UK bird report of that year. Such a position is always difficult to follow and the 2001 report is perhaps indicative of this, being much shorter and having fewer charts and tables.

However, the report is no mean publication and contains comprehensive information on the 225 species recorded in the county during 2001 including three new species, namely Red-breasted Goose, Dusky Warbler and Blyth's Reed Warbler, bringing the county total to an impressive 305 species. Some of the more unusual records are treated to separate articles and there are updates, a detailed ringing report, a summary of the year's events and monthly weather plus, and not least, a useful gazetteer with map references. The use of bold and coloured print nicely highlights important facts along with some appropriate sketches and colour photographs.

This all combines to produce a readable and informative publication from what is a relatively small but active county club and for which the compilers are to be congratulated. The report is available for £8.70 (incl. p&p) from William McBay, 4 Shamrock Street, Dunfermline, Fife KY12 0JQ.

Keith Macgregor

The Great Bustard by Estlin Waters. 2002. The Great Bustard Group, Romsey. 12 pp, numerous colour photos and illustrations.



This very attractive and informative booklet charts the sorry history of this spectacular species and recent efforts to re-establish it as a breeding bird in Britain. Formerly widespread in England, and even breeding as far north as Berwickshire in the sixteenth century, it had become virtually extinct by the early 19th century. Changes in landuse, disturbance and direct persecution (not least by the Norfolk gamekeeper who once killed seven with a single shot) were probably to blame. The last picture in the book features the famous Fair Isle female which arrived on the island in January 1970 and was then taken down to Wiltshire to join the reintroduction programme there.

The Great Bustard Trust was founded in the 1970s, but the breeding programme was unsuccessful and the trust was wound up in 1997. The Great Bustard Group was formed the following year and is "dedicated to the interest of the Great Bustard and to the possibility of a successful release of young birds..." With the prospect of industrial-scale agriculture bearing down on the Great Bustard's continental strongholds as a result of the expansion of the EU and its insane agricultural policies, the establishment of a successful breeding population in Britain may become not only desirable but vital for the conservation of the species.

Copies of the booklet (at the very reasonable price of £2.00 incl. p&p) and membership details can be obtained from Prof W E Waters, The Great Bustard Group, Orchards, Broxmore Park, Sherfield English, Romsey, Hants SO51 6FT.

Mike Fraser

The Birds of Heaven - Travels with Cranes by Peter Matthiessen, illustrated by Robert Bateman. 2002. The Harvil Press, London. 349 pp, 20 colour plates, b&w drawings, maps. ISBN 1-86046-947-7. Hbk. £20

A book to be read and treasured by all bird lovers. Master writer Peter Matthiessen charts an exciting journey starting in Siberia to see all 15 species of crane in the world. The reader is taken across Asia, Australia, Africa and Europe before the final chapters devoted to cranes in North America.

His narrative reveals his own love of birds in the lists of non-crane species seen wherever he travels to see cranes in both their breeding sites and on migration. Many stories are revealed of Man's relationship with cranes, in mythology, history,

scientific research or the layperson's efforts for conservation.

Naturally, Japan is visited and it is no surprise to learn of ordinary people having an extraordinary relationship with *Grus japonensis*, the Red-crowned Crane, which weighs up to 15kg and stands 1.5m tall. Matthiessen writes "to observe it dancing in Hokkaido's snows is the ultimate pilgrimage for ornithologists."

Closer to home is a chapter devoted to observing the Eurasian or Common Crane in its most westerly breeding site in Norfolk. Again, those people locally concerned are mentioned. As this species is known to migrate to North Africa among its many wintering sites, as well as occasionally appearing in North America, it is the only crane found in four continents.

Peter Matthiessen leaves his own country until last but again enriches the reader's experience with tales of the cranes' place in Native American folklore right across the continent. Some history is given of the Whooping Cranes which numbered approximately 15,000 birds at the time of the first Europeans in America, but only 26 in 1959. By October 2000 at least 267 existed, largely due to the efforts of many people whose research, conservation and evangelism for cranes is so well revealed in this fascinating tale.

The book is enhanced by the sublime artwork of Robert Bateman, in colour plates and in black and white drawings within the text. It would make a welcome addition to any book collection or library.

Brian Smith

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OUTER HEBRIDES BIRD REPORT 2001
The 2001 edition is now available, price £5.50 (inc p&p), from Andrew Stevenson, The Old Stores, Bornish, Isle of South Uist, Western Isles HS8 5SA. Cheques should be made payable to "*The Outer Hebrides Bird Report*".

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RURAL PORTRAITS
Scottish Native Farm Animals, Characters and Landscapes

Text by Polly Pullar
Illustrated by Keith Brockie

The illustrations from this book (to be published in May 2003 by the Langford Press, Wigtown) will be exhibited at the following venues: **McManus Galleries**, Dundee 16th May-16th June. **Royal Highland Show**, Ingliston 19th-22nd June. **Museum of Country Life**, West Kittochside, East Kilbride 1st July-1st August.

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DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY BIRD REPORT 2001
The 2001 edition is now available, price £4.50 (inc p&p), from Joan Howie, 60 Main Street, St John's Town of Dalry, Castle Douglas DGT 3UW.

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NOTES & COMMENT

Crane flock in Midlothian

On the evening of 5th October 2002, I heard some birds calling, faintly at first, and thought they might be Whooper Swans. As the birds got nearer the calls became louder and it was unmistakably the sound of Cranes. Then the flock appeared as indistinct silhouettes against the dark clouds, flying up the field behind my house, only 40 yards away and 30 feet up. There was a minimum of 22 in the flock, and possibly as many as 25. They were big birds with long slender necks and big broad wings. Then they went (just) over Wester Middleton farm and gave excellent silhouettes against the glow of Edinburgh's lights, showing their thin beaks and broad wings with broad ends and "fingered" primaries. They were calling all the time.

I am very familiar with Cranes, having heard and seen them regularly in Norfolk and frequently while in Sweden, but never expected to see so many at one time in Scotland! The record is subject to acceptance by the SBRC.

Trevor Smith

Treecreeper on peanut feeder

I was very surprised to see a Treecreeper feeding from a nut basket in my garden in North Berwick, East Lothian, on 9th January 2003. Despite daily observations, it has been seen on only two more occasions since. Nuts in two hanging baskets have been provided here, with seed and a fat-ball, since late November 2002 when I moved into this house. The food was quickly found by Blue, Great and Coal Tits, Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Goldfinches and (occasionally) Long-tailed Tits. Treecreepers have been seen at other times feeding in the usual manner on tree trunks and branches. *BWP* does not mention this behaviour, although the species has been recorded taking fat. I wonder if other members have seen this apparently unusual behaviour?

Mark Holling

Three Oystercatchers and a Black-faced Ewe

On 11th May 2000, I was driving down Glen Clunie, near Braemar, when I noticed an Oystercatcher which appeared to be sitting on its nest about 50cm from a Black-faced Ewe. The ewe was squatting on the ground looking as if it was about to lamb. This was an interesting situation so I pulled the car off the road, lowered the window and took a photo.

I then became aware that there were two other Oystercatchers nearby. In spite of the close proximity of the ewe to the sitting bird, one of them moved in and the two did a quick changeover. The ewe showed no sign of moving away, so I decided to stay where I was, camera at the ready. A few minutes later the bird which had just left the nest walked over and started pecking at the ewe's face. This had no effect so the bird mounted an aerial assault on the ewe's face and head. At this point my camera ran out of film, so I quickly put in a fresh one!

The ewe by now had turned round and was muzzling the sitting Oystercatcher's tail. This was too much and the bird was forced to get off the nest, whereupon it mounted a ferocious attack on the ewe. More trouble, my camera battery went flat! In haste I replaced it with a new one. By now the Oystercatcher was getting even more desperate and was attacking the ewe from every direction.

Fearing that the eggs would be crushed, I got out of the car and slowly walked down to the nest. The ewe got up unsteadily and moved away. To my surprise there were five eggs in the nest. (The usual clutch is two or three). I took a quick photo and went back to the car. Within a minute one of the birds returned, settled on the eggs and resumed incubation.

Closer examination of the photo shows that two of the eggs are more heavily blotched than the other three which suggests that two different females had laid their eggs in the nest. When I first arrived there was the sitting bird and two others. It seems likely these were two females and one male. As both sexes normally share with the incubation, it is possible all three participated.

The presence of the pregnant ewe was probably coincidental. It has been suggested that, being mature, she may have lambed before and sought the company of the Oystercatchers, knowing from experience that they would see off any predators.

The whole of the above sequence of events were photographed over a period of one-and-a-half hours. Unfortunately, due to other commitments I was unable to follow it up.

Sam Alexander

Birding or Birdwatching?

The above terminology really doesn't matter very much if you just do it! But when you have to write it down for some reason, you then have to ask yourself which is the more appropriate term to describe what you do?

The question will be with us fairly soon as the reality of a new home for the SOC approaches and a title is necessary. Already "Waterston House" is the firm favourite for obvious historical reasons, but a descriptive title has also to be found. The building is certainly going to be a Resource Centre, for yourselves, the established SOC members, and also potential members. "Scottish" it certainly will be! The Scottish ? Resource Centre.

I think most would agree that SOC members do a bit more (some, a good bit more) than merely "watch birds". The word "ornithologists" is already in our name, signifying that serious side to our pursuit.

So what about "Birding"? It makes for a simpler title and, for many, the word suggests that extra "specialist" purpose, which infers that we are all in this fascinating, learning game together and not merely satisfied to be amused by birds. So, "The Scottish Birding Resource Centre"? A suggestion to discuss.

Jimmy Maxwell

Desperate birds and a dozy mammal, as described in "Three Oystercatchers and a Black-faced Ewe." (Sam Alexander)

And finally...

We wonder if it was mere coincidence that, hard on the heels of the cover story in the last *SBN*, the following question was asked on "The Weakest Link" (that popular exercise in public humiliation) on 21st January: "What *P*", snarled Ms Robinson, "is a species of seabird that recently returned to breed on the Scottish island of Ailsa Craig following the successful eradication of rats?"

After some painfully protracted brow-furrowing and eye-rolling, the answer offered was "Pelican". (Some consolation may be had from the fact that this particular contestant, a disturbingly dim law student, did not go on to win the competition).

When informed of this elevation to the rank of TV celebrity, albeit indirect, momentary and anonymous, Bernie Zonfrillo, the author of the original article and Ailsa's erstwhile rat-exterminator-in-chief, commented:

"Good to know I have hit the summit as far as fame goes! A question on a quiz show - how many other ornithologists have got to that level before? I was once featured on an internet site called 'Bizarre events around the world' - does it still exist? Anyway, what was "bizarre" was, apparently, that I stayed on an island with 10,000 rats on it! Worryingly, a guy who ate a motor car was on the same site. Don't applaud, just throw money..."

Mike Fraser

RECENT REPORTS

Winter Review

Rufous Turtle Dove, Stromness, December 2002. (Hugh Harrop, Shetland Wildlife)

In a winter when there was a **Waxwing** influx, very high numbers of **Little Auks** in early Feb, good numbers of **Great Grey Shrikes** and the usual scatter of rare wildfowl, it is one bird (like last year's Snowy Egret), which will cause it to be remembered long after the others have been forgotten. That bird was the first **Rufous (Oriental) Turtle Dove** to be identified in Britain since 1975, at Stromness (Orkney) from 20th Nov–20th Dec. A first-winter of the western form *meena*, it was identified in the first week of Dec. It caused a major twitch over the next two weeks, invoking memories of the halcyon spring of 1988 when Orkney's biggest ever twitch took place for Pallas's Rosefinch and Needle-tailed Swift (the former, of course, later discredited as an escape), or even the male Pallid Harrier twitch on Orkney Mainland in 1995. The Rufous Turtle Dove seemed settled for the winter with the Collared Doves, and as several have over-wintered in Scandinavia (including one in Sweden for ten consecutive winters), was its premature departure due to a cat or Sparrowhawk? Despite there being only five British records between 1889-1975 it seems, remarkably, that there may have been another in Scotland this autumn. One was photographed near Tarbat Ness (Highland) on 5th Nov, coinciding with several late Turtle Doves reported early in that month. On size and plumage it looks very similar to the Orkney bird!

Bittern, Loch of Strathbeg, January 2003. (Harry Scott)

The other rarity highlight of the winter was probably the first-winter **Forster's Tern** at Loch Feochan and then Oban harbour (Argyll) on 8th-11th Jan. Only the third record for Scotland, it was associating with a Sandwich Tern, so they may well have been the same two birds seen earlier in the winter in Cornwall and at Dublin.

Forster's Tern, Oban, January 2003. (Bill Jackson)

A **White-billed Diver** was present throughout the winter at South Nesting Bay (Shetland), whilst a **Little Egret** toured Angus, Fife, Lothian and Upper Forth before settling down at Vane Farm RSPB (Kinross) where it was still present in Feb. Up to four **Bitterns** were seen: at Browhouses (Dumfries and Galloway) on 15th Feb, Loch Flemington (Highland/Nairn) on 25th Jan, and up to two at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (Aberdeenshire) with one bird showing very well there from 12th Feb. More unusually, two **Great White Egrets** were seen, one briefly at Musselburgh Lagoons (Lothian) on 1st Dec and one (from bare-part colouration probably of the American race *egretta*) on South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 10th-30th Nov.

Rare wildfowl were again prominent with **Ross's Goose** in Dumfries and Galloway (though occasionally visiting Cumbria), **Red-breasted Goose** on Islay and two blue-morph

Lesser Snow Geese (on Islay and in Angus/Aberdeenshire) present throughout the period. The star finds, though, were definitely the six **Lesser Scaups**. Up to two females were on South Uist from 7th Nov onwards, with a remarkable three drakes found at Auchenreoch Loch (Dumfries and Galloway) on 20th Dec. Two of these were present until 14th Jan both there and at nearby Milton Loch, with at least one still around in mid-Feb. Yet another drake was found at Vane Farm RSPB on 1st Feb. These days it seems hard to believe that the first British record of Lesser Scaup was as recent as 1987 (in Staffordshire). The first Scottish record was in 1990, remarkably enough at Auchenreoch and Milton Lochs!

There was also a good showing by **Ring-necked Duck**, now of course no longer on the BBRC list, but recently in danger of being upstaged by its North American *Aythya* rival. Drakes were reported in Fife, Dumfries and Galloway, on Harris and in Shetland, with females on Lewis and at least one in Aberdeenshire (at Loirston Loch on 4th-7th Dec and then Aboyne on 17th Feb). In

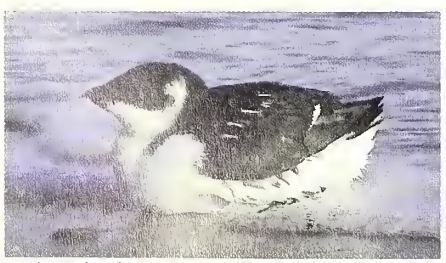
Female Ring-necked Duck, Aboyne Loch, January 2003. (Harry Scott)

contrast, it was a poor winter for **American Wigeon**, with single drakes seen on the Outer Hebrides and Argyll and three drakes present on south Mainland Shetland, probably returning birds for their third winter. Also in Shetland a **Black Duck** was found at Dales Voe on 18th Jan (third record for Shetland), whilst 15+ drake **Green-winged Teals** were reported. A second-winter drake **King Eider** (found in Oct) remained at Loch Ryan (Dumfries and Galloway) and at least 13 **Surf Scoters** were seen, including up to five (three drakes and two females) at Largo Bay (Fife) in Dec and Jan and five drakes off the Culbin/Nairn Bars (Moray and Nairn) on 16th Feb. It has not been a great winter for **Smew** with only 13 reported in Jan. Up to seven **Tundra Bean Geese** were in Shetland and two

were on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) in Dec/Jan, with one January report in Fife and five near Slamannan (Upper Forth) on 29th.

Two **Gyr Falcons** were reported in the period, both briefly: a white one in Shetland at the end of Nov and a grey one in Moray in Feb. There were no confirmed sightings of **Rough-legged Buzzard** this winter, arguably reflecting the true status of the species in Scotland, *ie* pretty rare! There was an exceptional Dec record of an **Osprey** at Loch Seil (Argyll) on 11th-12th. Indeed it was a winter for "late dates" and unusual over-winterers. Three **Swallows** were still on Tiree (Argyll) on 17th Dec, and in Nov there were single **Willow Warblers** in Shetland and Orkney on 5th, a **Swift** reported at Aberdeen on 9th and a **Redstart** on Hoy (Orkney) on 17th. A **Woodlark** over-wintered on Whalsay (Shetland) being present from Oct (this species has over-wintered in Shetland before). **Firecrests** were present in Dec at Stromness (Orkney) and Milngavie on 13th – only the fourth record for the Clyde area. A **Water Pipit** was at Barns Ness (Lothian) from 28th Dec, whilst one or two **Shore Larks** were seen in Angus with one at Montrose Basin on 31st Jan–2nd Feb. It or another was at Lunan Bay on 6th Feb. There were better numbers of **Lapland Buntings** this winter than for several years, with counts including up to nine at Ethie Mains (Angus) on 16th Nov and 10 near Rattray Head (Aberdeenshire) on 3rd Dec.

Like last winter, there was a very good showing by **Great Grey Shrike** with nine different birds reported in Dec-Feb including unusual midwinter records for Orkney and Shetland. There were reasonable numbers of **Mealy Redpolls** in Shetland in Jan and Feb, with an **Arctic Redpoll** discovered amongst them at Sumburgh Head on 5th Feb. **Waxwings** were present in reasonable numbers with another January invasion responsible, rather than large numbers arriving in Oct and Nov as used to be the case. Over 30 were logged in Nov and 50+ in Dec before 475 were seen in Jan, mostly from the 9th. There were no huge flocks as in the record-breaking influx of 2000/01, with the largest numbers in Lothian, Aberdeenshire and Highland. In Jan, 60 were at Musselburgh on 20th and 53 at Dalkeith on 19th (both Lothian), with 54 at Inverurie (Aberdeenshire) on 21st.



Little Auk, Thorntonloch, East Lothian, February 2003. (Calum Scott)

Little Auks, too, had been present only in low numbers throughout Nov, Dec and most of Jan, but northerly gales at the end of Jan brought large numbers of these millionaire Arctic breeders into the North Sea. Most were seen in the Firth of Forth and off Aberdeenshire on 31st Jan–2nd Feb. Counts included 632+ (including 507 in 50 minutes) past Girdle Ness on the afternoon of the 31st, with 518 in 1.5hrs on 2nd Feb; 800+ (including 726 in one hour) past Dunbar on 1st Feb, and 134 off nearby Barns Ness on 1st Feb with 154 there on 2nd; 271 past Cellardyke (Fife) on 31st Jan; 100+ off Yellowcraig (Lothian) on 2nd Feb, and 100 past Collieston (Aberdeenshire) in just 20 minutes on 1st. Whilst no large-scale wreck occurred as such, many of the birds passing were very close in and there were reports of birds being preyed upon by a Peregrine at Leven (Fife) and Great Black-backed Gulls at Peterhead (Aberdeenshire).

By recent standards it has been a very poor winter for **Iceland** and **Glaucous Gulls**. For the first time in many years the latter actually outnumbered the former with, in Jan, 18 Iceland and 30+ Glaucous reported. The largest count of Iceland was four at Lerwick (Shetland) on 7th Feb. Also in Shetland there were counts of six Glaucous at Burrafirth on Unst on 28th Jan and 6th Feb. **Mediterranean Gull**, in contrast, again showed up well with the now normal scatter of records. Musselburgh again proved the best site. A Dutch colour–ringed bird was present there, with Belgian-ringed birds in Ayrshire, Slovakian in Dumfries and Galloway, and Norwegian in Orkney (a first-winter at Stromness from 24th Nov, possibly only the second individual Mediterranean Gull ever seen on Orkney). Also on Orkney, the adult **Ring-billed Gull** returned for its fifteenth winter to Stromness, with an adult at Vidlin (Shetland) on 24th Jan and an adult at the Ugie Estuary (Aberdeenshire) from 25th Jan.

Mediterranean Gull (1st winter), Carlingwark Loch, Dumfries & Galloway, January 2003. (Brian Orr)

A first-winter **Long-billed Dowitcher**, found on the 8th Nov, over-wintered at Inver Bay (first record for Highland), whilst two **Grey Phalaropes** were seen – as part of the back-up team for the twitchers at Stromness on 7th Dec, and at Gruinard Bay (Highland) on 5th Jan. In Nov a late juv **White-rumped Sandpiper** was at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) on 9th-17th, whilst a **Pacific Golden Plover** again on South Uist on 9th Feb was presumably the bird present there the last two autumns and having wintered nearby.

Angus Murray, Birdline Scotland

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Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editor at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club,
Harbour Point, Newhailes Road,
Musselburgh, East Lothian EH21 6SJ
Tel: 0131 653 0653
Fax: 0131 653 0654
E-mail: mail@the-soc.org.uk

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

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